



COMMITTEE ON
**EDUCATION
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REPUBLICANS

**COMMITTEE
STATEMENT**

**Opening Statement of Rep. Greg Murphy (R-NC), Republican Leader of the
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investment, Hearing:
“Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Reauthorization: Examining
Successful Models of Employment for Justice-Involved Individuals ”
June 15, 2021**

(As prepared for delivery)

“Thank you, Chairwoman Wilson, for convening this bipartisan hearing. I’d like to welcome the witnesses to the Committee. I look forward to working with you to improve our country’s workforce development system.

America is known as the land of opportunity for a reason. Throughout our nation’s history we have shown a unique ability to accomplish what we set out to do. Part of this success is because we are blessed with an industrious citizenry, and part of this success is attributable to our faith in humanity’s ability to overcome the odds.

We are a nation of second chances. A prison sentence is not supposed to result in a permanent exclusion from the world. In fact, all corners of society have an interest in giving incarcerated men and women opportunities to equip themselves with the skills they need to succeed.

Steady work, performed with care and pride, honors the dignity of an individual and contributes to human flourishing. Reentry into the workforce is a key element toward realizing that personal fulfillment.

Federal criminal justice policy has a checkered past, but Republicans and Democrats are working together to solve those difficult problems. In 2018, nine months before I joined the House of Representatives, President Trump signed the First Step Act into law. We are hopeful the new legislation will maintain public

safety and reduce recidivism rates. And in December 2020, Congress authorized Pell Grants for incarcerated students, which will provide thousands of people access to a college education.

These may seem like insignificant changes, but they mean the world to those who benefit from them. I see no reason why WIOA reauthorization cannot play a small role in building upon this progress.

The Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO) program, currently funded through WIOA, supports youth and adults previously involved in the criminal justice system. REO grantees can assist these populations in a variety of ways, including with mentoring, housing, case management, employment, and violence prevention services. We have seen what works over the last 15 years, and I look forward to hearing from the witnesses how Congress can improve this funding stream.

Current law allows local workforce development boards to use up to 10 percent of their Adult and Dislocated Worker program funding to help unemployed or inconsistently employed individuals locate rewarding, transitional jobs through subsidized employment. Some workforce boards have used this flexibility to serve reentry populations. It is worth exploring what has worked for local communities. Congress can compile and publicize their best practices to other workforce boards that may be interested in expanding their services to incarcerated individuals.

Arrogance prompts us to believe that the federal government alone can support formerly incarcerated individuals. There are many local service providers, employers, and community-based organizations that all play an indispensable part in transforming the lives of ex-offenders, and their challenges cannot be solved with truckloads of money. We must leverage the experience of these too often overlooked partners during WIOA reauthorization.

One-size-fits-all mandates from Congress are precisely the wrong approach. Our workforce development system should be capable of listening and adapting to the needs of the local labor market, employers, and those seeking opportunity.

This reauthorization of WIOA must further encourage local communities to innovate when their existing operations fall short. Nobody should feel threatened

for trying new evidence-based ideas, and the pace of technological change demands a nimble approach to career preparation.

Ensuring people have the necessary skills to find good jobs is key to sustaining a thriving middle-class. As the pandemic recedes from our lives, overcoming the economic fallout is at the top of everyone's minds.

Our workforce development system must do a better job of helping all individuals looking to improve their skills. I am hopeful that a bipartisan WIOA reauthorization can provide justice involved individuals the workforce opportunities they deserve.”

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